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ABSTRACT

In Arkansas 110 adults were asked questions over the telephone about the quality of Arkansas' educational system. The use of the data gathered through the phone survey will help enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of educational decisions made by policymakers in Arkansas. Opinions of parents and the community are generally positive. Additionally, the community conveys willingness to provide further support through tax increases to improve the quality of education in Arkansas. Data obtained through the phone survey are compared with data on national attitudes toward public schools gathered for the Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward Public Schools (1993). Parallel findings between the Arkansas research project and the Phi Delta Kappa poll are identified. Arkansas citizens rank the quality of the Arkansas educational system higher than the nation's schools as a whole. Attached to the survey results is an Arkansas school study council newsletter. (KDP)

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PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY OF AN EXTENDED-SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT IN CENTRAL ARKANSAS WITH COMPARISONS TO **The 25th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/ Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools**

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PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY OF AN EXTENDED-SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT IN CENTRAL ARKANSAS WITH COMPARISONS TO *The 25th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*

A public opinion poll was conducted in the Fall of 1993 in an extended-suborban [sic] public school district in Central Arkansas. The purpose of the poll was to obtain data concerning public opinion within the specified community toward the local public school district. The instrument used was a revised version of *The Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward Public Schools* (1993). Additional items were included to meet the needs of the subject school district, and comparisons were made with appropriate items contained within *The 25th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude toward the Public Schools* (1993) which was conducted during the same time frame.

The purpose of the field research project described herein was to assess public perceptions about the quality of public education in the selected community. General and specific questions regarding public attitude toward the local public school system were asked in order to gain an understanding of public attitude. Comparisons were made where possible with the above mentioned national poll in order to assess the relationship of public attitude between the local, state, and national samples.

The school district selected for this field research project serves an extended-suburban community in Central Arkansas. The districts serves 3500 students (pre-K thru 12) with a certified staff of approximately two hundred. The community has a strong contingent of retired and elderly people as is indicated in the demographic portion of the data report.

A random sample was obtained from among the resident tax payers listed in the County Assessor's files. Therefore, residents who do not pay taxes to the local county or school district were excluded from the sample. A telephone survey was used in order to maintain a high response rate.

The response rate was more than 90 percent among the subjects contacted. The demographic data for the subjects within the sample was the following:

Table 1

Demographic Data for Subjects within the Sample

	Local Research Project Sample	National Sample
Sex:		
Men	36%	46%
Women	59%	54%
No Response	5%	
Race:		
Caucasian	89%	85%
Non-white	10%	11%
No Response	1%	
Age:		
16-29 years old	21%	23%
30-49 years old	38%	42%
50-93 years old	40%	34%
No Response	1%	1%
Marital Status		
Married	66%	Unknown
Single	34%	Unknown
Children or Grandchildren in the School System		
Yes	45%	Unknown
No	55%	64%
Years of Residency within the subject School District		
1-10 years	37%	Unknown
11-20 years	35%	Unknown
21-40 years	21%	Unknown
More than 40 years	7%	Unknown
Level of Education		
High School Graduate	60%	55%
Vocational/Technical School	6%	Unknown
College or University Graduate	23%	44%
Graduate Degree	8%	Unknown
Unknown	3%	Unknown

The Arkansas research project sample included a total of 110 adults. The demographic information illustrated in Table #1 indicates that the Arkansas sample

closely paralleled the national sample contained in the *Gallup Poll* (1993). Data for the Arkansas research project sample was obtained through telephone interviews.

Research Assistants were trained in order to maintain the consistency and internal validity of the instrument utilized. The field interviews for the Arkansas research project were conducted during October of 1993.

Research Report

(Item 1)

Grading the Public Schools

What grade would you give public schools in general?

Grade	Local %	*National %
A	14	2
B	32	17
C	37	48
D	7	17
F	2	4
No Response	8	12

*National statistics were taken from *The 25th Annual Phi Delta Gallup Poll of the Public's Toward the Public Schools.*

The residents in the Arkansas research sample rated the public schools in general higher than the respondents in the national survey rated the public schools. Eighty-three percent of the respondents in the local survey gave the public schools in general a C or better, while only 67 percent of the national sample rated the public schools with a C or better.

Forty-six percent of the respondents in the Arkansas research project gave public schools either an A or a B, only 19 percent of the respondents in the national sample gave the same grades respectively to public schools.

(Item 2)

Grading your public schools.

What grade would you give your local public schools?

Grade	Local %	National %
A	46	10
B	34	37
C	13	31
D	1	11
F	0	4
No Response	7	7

The residents in the Arkansas research sample rated their own public schools higher than respondents in the national sample. Ninety-three percent of the respondents gave their public schools a C or better, while only 78 percent of the respondents in the national sample rated their local public schools with a C or better.

Moreover, 80 percent of the respondents in the Arkansas research project sample gave their schools either an A or B while only 47 percent of the respondents in the national sample gave the same grades to their local public schools.

The data from the first two questions indicate some consistency between the local and the national surveys. Respondents gave higher grades to their own public schools than they give to public schools in general in both samples.

(Item 3)

Grading Special Services

What grade would you give your local public schools in their ability to serve students with special needs?

Grade	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
A	31	
B	31	
C	23	
D	1	
F	0	
No Response	15	

(Item 4)

Grading Gifted and Talented Services

What grade would you give your local public schools in serving gifted and talented students?

Grade	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
A	38	
B	33	
C	14	
D	3	
F	0	

More than 80 percent of the respondents in the Arkansas research sample gave their district a C or better on meeting the needs of gifted and talented students. No respondents felt that the district was failing in its efforts to meet the needs of these students.

(Item 5)

Extended Services

Do you think your school district should provide assistance to latchkey children whose parents come home after school hours?

Response	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Yes	54	
No	33	
No Response	13	

The majority of the respondents favor the idea of a latchkey program for the students in their district.

(Item 6)

Summer Programs

Do you think your local school district should provide a Summer program for children whose parents work during that time?

Response	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Yes	56	
No	38	
No Response	6	

Fifty-six percent of the respondents support a summer school program for the district's students.

(Item 7)

Year-round Schools

Would you favor keeping schools open year-round to better utilize the school buildings?

Response	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Yes	35	
No	55	
No Response	10	

The majority of the respondents do not favor a year-round school program. However, as the previous item suggested, respondents do favor adding summer programs to meet the day care needs of parents.

(Item 8)

Discipline and Safe Environment

Spanking is permitted for children who do not respond well to other forms of discipline. Do you approve or disapprove of this practice?

Response	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Approve	64	
Disapprove	34	
No Response	2	

Respondents in the Arkansas research project were supportive of the practice of corporal punishment when other forms of discipline are, interpreted as, not effective.

(Item 9)

Safe and Secure Environment for Students

Do you think that your local school district provides a safe and secure environment for students?

Response	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Yes	90	
No	3	
No Response	7	

As indicated in the item above 90 percent of the respondents in the Arkansas research project sample felt that their school district provides a safe and secure environment for students. This is a significant positive response considering the problems of violence within urban and suburban districts across the nation today.

(Item 10)

Education Past and Present

In the last five years, do you think the public schools in Arkansas have improved, gotten worse, or remained the same?

Response	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Improved	44	
Gotten worse	18	
Remained the same	28	
No Response	10	

(Item 11)

Education Past and Present

In the past five years, do you think your local school district has improved, gotten worse, or remained the same?

Response	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Improved	53	
Gotten worse	8	
Remained the same	21	
No Response	18	

(Item 12)

Education Past and Present

Do you think that children today get an education that is better than yours or worse than yours?

Response	Local	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Better than mine	54	
Worse than mine	36	
No Response	10	

Based on similar items in the *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll* (1993) public opinion is that public schools have improved in the recent past. The Arkansas research project has revealed similar findings. Data collected in the Arkansas research project also indicates that public opinion of their local school district is more positive than their opinion of improvement on a state-wide basis. Additionally, 54 percent of the respondents in Arkansas research project felt that education today is superior to that which they received.

(Item 13)

Teaching as a Career

Would you like your child or grandchild to become a teacher?

Response	Local %	National %
Yes	65	67
No	24	29
No Response	11	4

(Item 14)

Teaching as a Career

Do you think the teachers ought to be nationally licensed instead of licensed by each different state?

Response	Local %	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Yes	47	
No	33	
No Response	20	

(Item 15)

Teaching as a Career

Do you think the pay for public school teachers should be increased?

Response	Local %	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Yes	70	
No	20	
No Response	10	

As indicated in the items above, results of the Arkansas research project indicate that respondents within the sample have a positive view of a teaching as a career. Furthermore, a majority of respondents felt that teachers' salaries should be increased. finally, these same respondents also felt that licensure should be issued nationally as opposed to being issued by each individual state as is the current practice.

(Item 16)

Parent Involvement

Do you believe that there is enough parent involvement in your local public school district?

Response	Local %	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Yes	37	
No	41	
No Response	22	

Forty-one percent of the respondents within the Arkansas research project sample felt that there was not enough parent involvement in the schools. A substantial percentage of those surveyed gave no response.

(Item 17)

Prayer

Do you agree with the United States Supreme Court ruling on the removal of prayer from the public schools?

Response	Local %	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Yes	20	
No	75	
No Response	5	

A similar question was posed by the *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll* (1993) concerning prayer at graduation ceremonies. Seventy-four percent of the respondents in the national poll favored prayer at graduation ceremonies. Twenty-three percent were against prayer at graduation ceremonies, and three percent had no opinion. The national data offers a strong parallel to the local data in the similar item above.

(Item 18)

Support

Would you be willing to pay more taxes to help raise the standards of education in your local schools?

Response	Local %	No Parallel Item in the National Survey
Yes	65	
No	34	
No Response	1	

It is significant to note, as is illustrated in the table above, that 65 percent of the respondents in the Arkansas research project sample indicated a willingness to provide additionally financially [sic] support to their local school district in order to raise the standards of education.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There are a number of parallel findings between the Arkansas research project and the *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll* (1993). In the public forums, and in the context of general questions about the institution of education in general, public opinion is

References

Elam, S.M., Rose, L.C., and Gallup, A.M. (1993). The 25th annual phi delta kappa/gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 75 (2), 137-152.

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frequently negative and the criticisms are numerous. However, as indicated in the national as well as the Arkansas research project, when parents and community members discuss the local school systems, opinions are generally positive and supportive.

Community members in the Arkansas research projects demonstrated significant support for their schools in several key survey items. Eighty percent of the respondents in the Arkansas research project graded their local school system with a B or better, and 46 percent of those same respondents gave the school system an A. Nationally, only 47 percent felt their local schools deserved a B or better and only 10 percent gave their local schools an A. Moreover, when providing a grade to the state's schools, only 14 percent felt that an A was justified and only 32 percent gave the schools across the state a B.

Finally, 46 percent of the Arkansas research sample gave their local schools an A and 34 percent of the same respondents gave their local schools a B. Only 13 percent of the same sample rated their local schools with a C, and 37 percent gave the schools across the state a C.

School Safety is an increasingly important issue across the nation. Ninety percent of the respondents in the Arkansas research sample felt that their school district is [sic] provides a safe and secure environment for students. Only three percent felt that the educational environment was not safe. Seven percent of the same sample had no response.

When asked about positive changes or improvements in the educational institution, 44 percent of the respondents in the Arkansas research project felt that their local school system had improved. Eighteen percent felt that their local schools had worsened and only eight percent felt that their local schools had regressed. Fifty-four percent felt that the education experienced by today's youth was better than that which

they had experienced personally, and 36 percent of the same respondent group felt that education was of a lesser quality than they had personally experienced.

Notably, the respondents in the Arkansas research project supported a pay increase for teachers with a 70 percent majority and 65 percent of the same respondents would be supportive if their child or grandchild said they wanted to become a teacher. Only 24 percent would oppose that career choice, and 11 percent had not opinion.

The Arkansas research project had provided a strong parallel with the national *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll* (1993). The Arkansas research project has also provided important information which substantiates that, within the context of the selected sample school district, the residents are very positive about the quality of their local school district. Moreover, the same respondent group indicated that they are willing to provide further support through tax increases to improve the quality of the educational experience for the youth in their community.

The field research design illustrated herein is important for education administrators in the process of making decisions related to bonded indebtedness, program expansion, and support for teaching professionals within the school system. A studied response to questions concerning public opinion is vitally important and extremely helpful in making policy and administrative decisions which require substantial public support.

A recognition that the public education organization within any community is an open organization which requires substantial positive public support is an important step in establishing an effective public education system. The use of field research data, rather than an estimate of public opinion or an ***educated guess***, will no doubt, enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of educational decisions made on behalf of the youth who people our public schools.

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Elam, S.M., Rose, L.C., and Gallup, A.M. (1993). The 25th annual phi delta kappa/gallup poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 75 (2), 137-152.

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ARKANSAS SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 1994

Another year is here and with it the same old problems. It has been eleven years since the State Supreme Court ordered a new equitable finance system. So, what do we have?

-- The difference between the highest and lowest expenditure per pupil is $3964. This gap is higher than the average per pupil amount.

-- The difference between the highest and lowest average teacher salary is $14,994. This is about the same amount of the salary paid beginning teachers in some districts.

-- The difference in millage between districts is 40. This is higher than the state average millage.

An awful lot of hard work was put in by Alma and the other plaintiff districts. A good deal of money was spent. A sizable amount of sound and fury was generated. Yet, in the long run we are no better off.

Texas and Missouri are struggling to improve their finances now. Yet, it would seem that like Arkansas they will end up frustrated and once more manipulated by political special interests.

Private Enterprise

We thought that the defeat of George Bush would end the discussion of vouchers. It was wishful thinking. Like a lot of lousy ideas this one keeps hanging around. Most recently the literature has been replete with comments as to how free enterprise would compare schools. Competition is seen as the spur to better educatio

Of course none of them care to mention that the area of education which is dominated by private enterprise. This is Day Care. all we have to do is look at it and imagine all education being so administered. Day Care institutions range from excellent to rotten, with child molestation charges been made against them. All children are not served. Some who are served are actually harmed by the experience. Public education would never tolerate the lower end of the Day Care spectrum. But all the warm words about the American way and competition and free enterprise seem to lull people into being convinced that the idea would work when all they have to do is look around them for proof of the fallacy.

Teacher Assessment

The State Department of Education is quite upset and should be. Districts have been using the results of teacher evaluations as the basis for discharge of some individuals. However, unless the system of teacher evaluation is the same one approved by the state in the late 80's then the discharged teacher may have the state testify that the wrong system was used. This sounds like a good recipe for "egg in the face."

What district must do is either to stick with the approved system or get the different one approved.

Apologies

You did not receive a news letter in December because we were working on a grant proposal to the United States Department of Education for a finance study. Should we be funded we intend to demonstrate that equity is really possible.

Thanks

I would like to thank all of you who wrote those nice letters about me to Dr. Christopher Lucas.

1993 Awards

As is our practice in years past, we give these Yearly Awards to deserving people:

Coach of the Year	Mike Ditka who didn't lose a single game.
Doctor of the Year	Hillary Clinton who has added medicine to the list of things she knows little about.
Best Cover-up of the Year	Ronald Reagan and George Bush who didn't know anything about Iran-Contra.
I Told You So Award	Emmet Smith of the Cowboys. They couldn't win without him.
Red Face Medal	Jerry Jones who wasn't going to sign Emmet Smith.
Baseball Strike Commendation Pin	The New York Mets who need an excuse for such a lousy record.
The Daryl Strawberry Award for having done nothing in particular	Daryl Strawberry
The Most Disheveled Looking Athletic Commendation Medal (also known as the Biggest Slob Award)	John Kruk
The Black Coach who seems to be already boycotting winning especially during road games recognition pin	Nolan Richardson
The "He Finally Figured Out How to Beat the Aggies" Award	Lou Holtz
"The Only Way is Up" Commendation Ribbon	Danny Ford or whoever is coach of the Razorbacks